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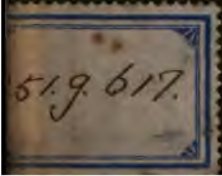
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GRAY'S COURT

MARY CONSTANCE BOURNE



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GRAY'S COURT.

BY

MARY CONSTANCE BOURNE.

LOUTH:

JACKSON AND PARKER, MARKET-PLACE.

LONDON:

SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, & Co., STATIONERS' HALL COURT.

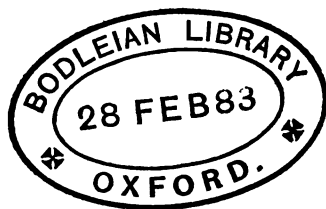
1882.

251. g. 617.

This tale, the incidents of which are taken from life, was written in the days when the writer was working heart and soul for God on Earth. And it is printed for circulation now that she has entered into her rest, as a testimony to what the Grace of God can do, and is doing, in the hearts of the children of men. This will give the book an interest for all Christians, and to those who knew the writer, the name on its title-page will make it a coveted and valued possession.

ALBERT SYDNEY WILDE.

Easter, 1882.



GRAY'S COURT.



CHAPTER I.

PLEASANTLY situated amidst the sheltering hills lies the small country town of Ludworth. While to the west the scenery is varied and picturesque, you have on the other hand a bleak, uninteresting reach of country open to our Eastern Coast with scarce a hill or tree to break the fresh pure air from the sea. The town itself is unpretending, and far behind this age of progress. Its glory centres in the noble Parish Church, whose lofty spire serves as a land-mark far and wide, pointing heavenwards, as though to lead one's thoughts beyond itself to the Temple on high. Beneath the Church's shadow stands the Rectory surrounded by stately elm trees, in whose wide spreading branches the rooks love to build. Homes of the rich, and homesteads of the poor, a Hospital, a Grammar School, some few public buildings, lastly the High-street, with the Library, and the attractions of Ludworth are quickly told. Passing by the larger houses

let us seek the humble cottage home in which our story opens. Standing a little apart from the street, in an obscure part of the town, though not far from the Church is Gray's Court.

At No. 2 we pause, and enter. "Come Jack, make haste, and be off to School. You'll be late again—it's a strange thing you can't finish your dinner when other folks do!"

The words were uttered in sharp impatient tones, and called forth a somewhat surly reply.

"I don't see why you should make such a stir, mother. It's ten minutes to two yet, and I haven't been late for ever so long!"

"Not since last time," retorted the mother, "and that's all you can say. Come, wash your hands and be off!"

At this moment the door opened and in trooped a family of children, varying in age from eleven to four years old.

"Not gone to school yet! why what have you all been up to? I sent you out ten minutes ago." "I want my cap mother," cried a boy of seven, instantly beginning a noisy search for the missing article.

"Mary wants her boot-lace tying!" shouted another child. "Fred, come away from that fire, you'll be burnt to death; there's the baby crying again; get away you children! you'll be the death of me!"

More rushing to and fro,—a clatter of plates and dishes,—a chair overturned,—angry words,—and a sharp hit or two, and the last child, down to an infant of four, had been

turned out into the street, and quiet was restored to the little cottage home.

Poor Mrs. Norton sat down on the nearest chair, her baby in her arms, and sighed heavily. A look of extreme weariness is in her face, an expression of restlessness and dejection in her eyes. Wearied with half a life, anxious, and full of care and forboding, spiritless, unrestful, her very life a burden, such was the sad and oft repeated story so plainly to be read there.

And yet Mrs. Norton was by no means an unthrifty woman. She was industrious, honest and true—or so she wished to be,—she prided herself on her good management. Though no children were more neat and tidy than her own, she had to work hard to keep them so, and in spite of ill-health from time to time she struggled bravely to keep up their character for respectability. This was what she lived for,—toiled for,—suffered for,—and nothing more; and her's was a sad and weary life.

There was another trouble too. Her husband was not the help he might have been. He was a hard-working man, it is true, always at his business, when he was in good health; but being by no means strong, he was often laid aside. This however was not the worst. Norton's great temptation was drink. Not that he was an habitual drunkard, but alas! so great a part of his much needed earnings was spent in drink, that the family always continued poor; and when mother was more cross than usual, the children knew it was because father had been taking

to his drink again. Often did the man resolve to forsake his sin. For a shorter or longer time he would abstain, and then the force of habit, so strong upon him, overcame him, and again he would give way,—helpless, hopeless, reckless. He knew his weakness, but turned not to the Giver of Grace and Strength. We vainly dream that in our own unaided might we can conquer the besetting sin. Hence “the broken vow ; the frequent fall.”

But while Mrs. Norton is brooding over her troubles, and wondering how she is to pay her way, and get food enough for the family, when Saturday comes, we will first say a few words about that family. Ever since their marriage, eighteen years ago, Norton and his wife had been what the world would call unlucky. At first there was scarcity of work ! then sickness came ; and ere long, the wife's savings from hard years of honest service were exhausted. Then the first home had to be broken up, and they must seek work elsewhere, hoping for better times. From place to place they wandered, staying but a year or two at most, struggling hard with poverty, while hope and courage were ebbing fast out of their hearts. And then, more terrible than all, there came into the home, that fell foe *drink*, which breaks the true woman's heart, and perils the very soul of its victim,—but for the last few years, times have been somewhat better. About six years before the story opens, Norton heard there was a good opening in a large, respectable business at Ludworth ; so thither the family made a final move, with such small possessions as

still remained to them. There were now seven children—William, the eldest, about fourteen, had lately been apprenticed to a trade; then came Jack, two years younger; Harry, a merry, bright-eyed boy of eleven; Lizzie, a gentle little maiden of nine years, who was always doing things for everybody; Robert, or Bob, as the children called him; Mary, the father's pet, and Freddy, the baby. Happily for him, Norton was fond of children, and although he was sometimes put out by conflicting tongues, yet he was a kind father, and in many ways a wise one.

But how they lived, was the wonder! Nine mouths to fill, and though the work was steady, the wages were but small; and then that fearful drink! But the boys were getting older every day, and soon would bring in some earnings. And may be brighter days were coming.



CHAPTER II.

THE clock struck three. Mrs. Norton started up in alarm. Why an hour had flown, and the dinner things had not been cleared away! Baby had gone to sleep; so, laying him quietly in the cradle in the chimney corner, she began to hurry about the little kitchen, clearing away the things, and setting all to rights. Quickly the work was done, and having put the kettle on the fire, and set out the tea, to be ready when her husband should come in, Mrs. Norton again sat down, and rested her aching head upon her hands. A gentle tap at the door, and as she opened it a lady entered, and greeted the poor woman with a bright smile and a kind word.

"How are you to-day Mrs. Norton? Are you very busy? I wanted to have a few words with you."

"Oh! please come in Ma'am," was the prompt reply. The Rector's lady was a well loved friend of rich and poor alike. "Come in Ma'am, I'm all by myself this afternoon, and the children wont be home for another hour yet." "Is your husband in?" inquired Mrs. Mayne, stepping inside the cottage, and sitting down. "I rather wanted to see him for a few moments."

"I expect him home for tea about four Ma'am, and it's almost that now," replied Mrs. Norton, looking at the

clock, "Sometimes he's early, sometimes late; would you wait a bit ma'am, or shall I tell him to come up to the Rectory to night?"

"I will wait a short time, and if I do not see him, you must give him a message instead. The fact is we want some one to take Burton's place as organ-blower at the Church, on Sundays; and we have been thinking perhaps Norton might be glad to have the work, what do you think about it?"

"You are very kind, I'm sure Ma'am. We do want all the bit of help we can get. I only wish he *would* do it, and keep steady at it, but I'm rather fearful. You see he comes home late on a Saturday night, and he never gets up in time to go to Church on a Sunday Morning. If I get him off at night, it's as much as ever I can do!"

"Then don't you come yourself, Mrs. Norton?" inquired the Rector's wife.

"Why no Ma'am, it's not often as I can come to Church. In the morning, there's the children to get off to school, and the dinner to cook—we like a bit of hot dinner you see on a Sunday; and at night, there's the baby, and the children to see to, and get to bed. I sometimes go in an afternoon, but Norton mostly likes a walk then."

Mrs. Mayne sighed. It was the old story. Everything must be thought of before God, the giver of our life. The hard service of the world must be chosen before the service of love and freedom, and God's honour must be thought of last!

"Well Mrs. Norton," replied the lady rising, "Think the matter over, and speak to your husband about it. It may be that regular work in God's House may lead him to find help and comfort there; and that what is duty at first, may with God's blessing, prove his greatest happiness. At any rate, will you ask Norton to come to the Rectory this evening, and speak to Mr. Mayne about this little matter, as we shall want to fill up the place quickly."

"Yes Ma'am, I'll be sure and tell him," said Mrs. Norton, as she opened the cottage door. "And thank you kindly. It's very good of Mr. Mayne to think of us, especially as he knows Norton is not always very steady."

"Yes, that was the one difficulty," replied Mrs. Mayne, "and for some time Mr. Mayne hesitated before he would let me mention it to you. But we are ready to make the trial, if your husband is willing, and it may help him to keep sober."

So saying, Mrs. Mayne left the cottage, adding a word of kind farewell, and encouragement, which lingered as a sunbeam brightening the clouded life.

That same evening, when the children were all gone to bed, Norton and his wife were sitting alone beside the little fire. It was an evening in October, and the nights grew chilly.

"Well Jem! and how did you get on at the Rectory?" inquired his wife at last, breaking the long silence.

"Oh! Mr. Mayne is a *real* gentleman, as he always is; he was that kind he nearly took my breath away."

"Aye. But how about the organ Jem?" inquired the wife in a doubtful tone. "Oh! that'll be all right and square I hope, wife. I said as how I'd do my best, and I will. I'm not a strong man, and its a strange big organ, and wants a deal of wind—but as the parson says, I've two strong boys, and I can take them with me. It's three times they want me on Sundays, and once in the week.—Thursday night service, and to stop while they practice the boys afterwards. Why, folks'll say Norton has turned Church-goer all at once," added the man laughing. "They might say worse than that," returned his wife.

"Why, I shall have to turn to, and go myself! And when are you going to start?" "Thursday night, to be in trim by Sunday. To day's Tuesday, so it's quick work and no mistake. I declare I shall feel strange and queer going to Church regular,—I never set up for that kind of thing, Mary!"

"No Jem, I sometimes wish we had. I was brought up to it, and so were you, you know, and yet we've somehow slipped first out of one thing, and then another. But may be this is to be a new start like."

"May be," was the short reply. But he was not vexed with what she had said. Mary knew he was thinking about it; so quietly lighting a candle, she only said.

"Are you coming yet, Jem? I'm going to bed."

"Don't wait for me wife, I'll stop up, and mind the fire a bit. Good night."

Mary Norton took her candle, and went upstairs.

Soon all sounds were hushed, and Norton sat on in his chair by the chimney corner, alone with his own thoughts. Now and then a shadow passed over his face, as though a thought of darkness or of sorrow were within. Then a gleam of light would cross him, like a thought of hope. It was as though a conflict between right and wrong were going on within him. So an hour flew by. And the dying embers in the grate cast a faint light on the little room. The man started to his feet, a look of resolution on his face. Scarce audibly, but in earnest tones he muttered, "*I will give it up! once more I'll try and free myself, and be a man!*" But there was no knee bent in prayer for strength to keep the resolution; no upward turning of his thoughts to God, seeking His help. The man's strength was weakness. He was the more weak, because he felt so strong. The way was yet all darkness. What wonder that he fell so often.



CHAPTER III.

IT was about a fortnight later in October, and one of those bright mornings, when the sun seems to do his very best to cheer us before dull winter clouds shall hide him from our sight. Cheery sunbeams found their way into the Norton's little cottage home that morning; they gladdened the geranium plants on the window ledge, they danced upon the walls of the little kitchen, and they brightened the faces of the mother and her child who were busy at their Monday morning's work. The other children were at school; but Lizzie, the eldest girl, was kept at home for this half-day, to help her mother. It did not often happen so, for Mrs. Norton as a rule, sent her children very regularly to school, only on this day there was more work than usual.

Mrs. Norton was washing; the child was bustling about, clearing away the breakfast things, and tidying up the room.

"Make as much haste as you can, there's a good girl," said Mrs. Norton briskly, "there's a deal to do to day, and we must get on with things. Father wont be home for dinner, so you'll have to carry him his bit of meat to the shop at twelve o'clock." A pause—"Why here's Betsey Parker coming with those clothes to wash! She's earlier

than common I'm thinking. Run and open the door Lizzie!"

The child obeyed, and in came a neighbour carrying a huge basket of clothes. Setting it down with a sigh of relief, she began talking fast with a face and tone all excitement.

"Have you heard the news Mrs. Norton? Why there's a great circus coming into the town. They say it's ever such a grand one—all the way from London. It's to go right through the town at twelve o'clock! Folks say as there never was such a circus! The Queen and the Prince of Wales has seen it! In course you'll go to night!"

The speaker paused, not because she had exhausted the subject, but for want of breath.

"I never heard anything to equal you, Betsey Parker! How you do run on! As if I could leave my wash tub on a Monday morning, and be running about after circuses! I've something better to do! It's all very well for the Queen and the Prince of Wales to go and amuse themselves, as have nothing else to do! But dear me, where would my children be, I should like to know, if I were always gadding about!" And with an air of extreme superiority, Mrs. Norton returned to her duties at the wash tub.

"Well! you are a queer woman, I must say!" replied the neighbour. "Here's a chance as you may get once in a life-time as you may say; for the circus is off again in no time, and you wont so much as come and look at it. Why, there's jockeys, and horses, and elephants, and ponies, and girls dressed up, and—"

"You seem to know as much about it all, as if you'd seen it," interrupted Mrs. Norton, without deigning to look up—"Oh! it's all over the town:—the pictures I mean, and bills to say what they are going to do. Now come along, do, I'm sure you won't be sorry; you needn't be out long."

"I can't say it's much in my line, thank you," replied the other coolly, "besides, I've Norton's dinner to get ready. No, I'm not coming, so you needn't say any more."

"Leastways the child can come with me" said Betsey Parker, nodding at Lizzie who stood by with bright wistful eyes, drinking in every word the neighbour was saying.

"Not she," replied the mother, without heeding the child's blank looks. "I'm not going to have her running amongst the crowd, and getting into the way of the horses. It's not the place for children."

"But I'll take good care of her," pleaded Betsey.

"Do let her come, poor little dear!"

"I've said it, Betsey Parker," was the retort, "and when I say a thing, I mean it!"

"Well then! if you won't be persuaded, good-day, for I'm off!"

"Good-day Betsey, and I wish you joy." A loud shutting of the door, and the cottage was quiet again.

A quarter to twelve came. The dinner was ready, and Lizzie, with her hat on, was on the point of starting to the shop where her father worked. Mrs. Norton was giving her a parting word of warning.

"Now Lizzie, off you go, and mind and be careful. You've plenty of time to go straight there and back before twelve o'clock, and we'll have dinner as soon as you get home.

Don't go into High Street, but go the near way to father's shop, and come back the same way.—Now be quick, and don't stop to talk to anyone,—come straight home."

"All right mother," said Lizzie, and taking up her basket, she set off. Mrs. Norton began to get the children's dinner ready. Twelve o'clock came, and found the table spread with the plain, simple meal. Lizzie had not come back. The children came in from school—the boys from work. They were soon round the table, quiet, and satisfying their hunger. A quarter-past twelve and no Lizzie.

"What *can* the child be about!" exclaimed Mrs. Norton, for the third or fourth time.

The scolding tone was gone. She was at last growing uneasy.

"I think I'll just put on my bonnet, and go and see if I can find her," said she.

"Now Jack, do you think you can be a good boy for once, and mind the children, while I go and look for Lizzie? I shan't be many minutes. Now be good, and don't get into mischief—there's good children, and I'll perhaps make you some cakes for tea—that is, if you're all very good." A few minutes more, and the mother, with her baby in her arms, was pacing quickly along towards

the street where her husband worked.

Meanwhile there was considerable excitement and confusion in High Street, and the more busy thoroughfares of the town. The crowds of people were increasing. The Circus procession was nearly an hour late; any moment it might appear, and people waited in breathless expectation. At last came the welcome sound of a drum.

Bright music drowned the voices of the crowd. The brass trumpets of the band glittered in the sunshine. The gay trappings of the horses waved in the breeze. Car followed car, drawn by prancing steeds. Men and boys and girls in gorgeous dresses filled the cars or rode the restive horses. Elephants with heavy, stately tread, carried on high the riders, in their strange tower-like houses!

More chariots, more horses, and another band of music, and the procession had passed.

The crowds closed in. The street was a mass of living men, and women, and children, rushing, pushing, struggling, vainly trying to press forward after the retreating band.

All at once there rose a cry! A sharp loud cry of terror! Tearing wildly round the corner of the street, there came a horse and carriage. The people in sudden panic flew to the sides of the road. Suddenly the horse was pulled up, but it was too late. That wild, terror-stricken cry, what was it?

A dark object lying on the road. A little form stretched there, quiet and motionless. The crowd closed

quickly round. Who was it? What was it? Was it *death*? Breathless, livid, white with fear, struggling through the people, pressing into the very midst, there came a woman.

"My child! yes, I know it is my child. Oh! let me see her! where is she?"

"Mind the woman! Mind the baby! Let her pass!"

Strong arms were round the child. Tenderly it was raised, and placed on a board. The child was covered, and the face could not be seen. And the sad burden was gently borne away. But the woman, where was she? Her great fear realized, she could bear up no longer. A deadly faintness overcame her—a mist rose before her eyes—her head was in a whirl—she sank upon the pavement, her baby lying in her arms.



CHAPTER IV.

WHERE is Mother? I want Mother." The voice was very low and weak, the voice of a little child in pain.

"Where am I?" the child went on. "Where have they taken me to? Oh! take me home to Mother!" A cool hand was laid upon her brow, and a soft voice answered: "Mother will come soon, dear child, she wont be long. Don't be afraid; see what a nice room you are in." The speaker was the Hospital nurse who was sitting by the child, waiting until she should awake from the short, restless sleep, which had followed many hours of unconsciousness. The child looked up, with large weary eyes.

"I don't like this big room, I want to go home," repeated she.

"Wait till Mother comes," replied the nurse. "Look over there. Do you see that poor little girl in the bed on the other side of the room? *she* has some pain to bear, like you. But see, she looks so happy. Wont you smile, and be happy too?"

The child looked round. There were several little beds in the large, bright room; there were other little children,

some older, some younger, than our little stranger. Stranger, did I call her? We have seen her before. The small white, sorrowful face belonged to little Lizzie Norton. She was brought from that sad accident, yesterday, to the Hospital; but of what followed that awful moment, she knew nothing. The child's eyes wandered round the room; they rested on the pictures covering the walls, and on the bright flowers on a little stand by her bed-side.

"It all looks very pretty," murmured she. "Where can I be? And why am I lying here?"

The nurse looked hopeful; in a cheerful voice she answered; "Isn't it a nice place dear? You don't know where you are though, do you? This is the Hospital, and when you were hurt yesterday, they brought you here to be made well again, You'll be so happy here."

"Yes, I think I shall," replied the child. "Oh! now I know! Yes, I had gone out, and the town was full—and a horse and carriage"—the child shivered slightly, as her memory returned.

"Never mind now dear," said the nurse. "You are safe now, and soon I hope you will be better. I am the nurse, and I am going to take care of you."

"Thank you," answered Lizzie, "I'm very glad. I like you. You look so kind."

And as the child looked up into the sweet face bending over her, she smiled, and the sad expression passed away. The nurse, well content to see the little girl so quiet and happy, rose from her seat, and went about her duties.

She was anxious too, to keep Lizzie as quiet as possible ; for the accident had been a serious one, and the doctors said there must be no excitement, but perfect rest, for a short time.

Poor child ! at that terrible moment when the horse plunged round the corner of the street, she was standing on the road close by.

A severe kick from the horse, laid her senseless on the ground ; in an instant the carriage wheel had passed over her. Happily, there was no injury done to the head, but one leg was broken, and there were other severe bruises besides.

But the child knew nothing at the time ; and not until the strange awakening on the following day, did she discover that anything was amiss. Norton came early on that morning to see his child ; but went away again without one look of recognition ; and the poor mother was to come up later in the day, and hear what the doctors had to say.

It was a heavy sorrow for the Nortons ; and all the harder to bear, because they looked upon it as a sad misfortune, come by chance, or ordered by a hard, stern fate.

They had yet to learn that sorrows are sent from a Father who loves us,—Christ's " Presence-tokens " to remind us that He is near,—and that He would have us take up our Cross, and follow Him.

..... Days passed away, and weeks ; three weeks since we last saw Lizzie Norton, lying in her little bed in the Hospital. During that time, there had been much

improvement. She had gone on pretty steadily towards recovery. And the weeks had not been such weary ones after all. There was the novelty of her different life; there were the comings and goings of friends who would often visit the patients in the Hospital; the happy half-hours when the kind Rector came into the children's ward—and the visits of Mrs. Mayne, who would sometimes bring her little girl, to see the sick children.

It was one Thursday afternoon. November had come in, with its dull, shortening days.

The wind was making havoc of the leaves, as the trees swayed to and fro, and the rain came down in gusty showers. Without,—all was cheerless, cold, and wintry; but within,—a bright fire blazed in the children's ward, shedding a warm light over walls and pictures, and all inside the room. Bright happy faces, and eager expectant looks; for this afternoon was the Rector's day, and the children well knew that the dull, stormy weather would only make him the more sure to come and cheer them with his kind words! Happy they who minister to Christ's little ones in pain; who give their lives in loving service to the Master! Not *here*; hereafter will they know how many a dark, sad soul they have led into the Light and Peace of God. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto ME."

Suddenly there was a quick firm foot-fall in the passage, and well did the children know that sound. When the door opened a minute afterwards, their eyes were turned

in happy welcome to the Rector. Round the ward he went, passing amongst the children—pausing by each small bed, to say a word of hope and help to the little one who was sick.

What a bright happy face his was! It did one good to look on it. No wonder the children loved him, for they felt, as all felt instinctively, that he was one with them in their sorrows, and ever ready to share their joys. He was never too busy to listen to any tale of sorrow; nor spared any trouble or pains to help those who needed help. With unwearied love and patience, he strove to be a father to the people in his Parish, and to lead all, both rich and poor, to the Feet of our Father, Who is in heaven.

How quickly flew the half-hour, while Mr. Mayne was talking to the children. At last he came to a little bed, near the door, rather apart from the rest, where Lizzie Norton was lying. Very bright was the smile with which she welcomed the kind visitor.

“Well Lizzie! you *do* look better! How is the poor leg to-day?” He began, sitting down on the chair beside her.

“I am much better, thank you,” answered the gentle child-voice. “I hope I may soon get up a little. Nurse thinks I may, if I’m good and quiet a little longer.”

“Yes dear child; and think how nice it will be when you can get up and help those other little maidens who are in bed like you. God is making you well again, Lizzie; do you thank him?”

“Yes,” replied the child simply.

"He has made me very happy here. But oh! I do want to ask you something, may I?" and a cloud gathered on the child's brow, and a faint flush was on her cheek.

"I was so very naughty," she began; "that day when I was run over. I wanted to tell you about it. I am so sorry! but I did such a bad thing"—she stopped a moment, and then went on encouraged by the question gently asked,

"What was it, Lizzie?"

"Mother had sent me out with father's dinner. And I left it at the shop. Mother told me to go straight home, and I said I would, but I didn't. I wanted to see the Circus, and so I went, and then, I was run over. But oh! it was *so* bad of me! Will God *ever* forgive me?" The child's eyes were full of tears; her voice broken with the effort to keep from crying.

"Have you asked Him to forgive you dear child?" asked the Rector tenderly.

"Yes, I've asked Him ever so many times. But I'm sure He must be very angry with me. Will He forgive me some day, if I try to be good?"

"He *has* forgiven you, my child," was the reply. "He has forgiven you *now*. Our dear Lord died on the Cross that you might be forgiven. 'The Blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin.' Jesus knew we should need forgiveness, and that is why He died for us.—Do you understand me?"

"Yes," returned the child; and then after a moment's pause, "But I was so very naughty; and often before

that day I had done so many bad things."

"Yes Lizzie, that is quite true. You were very naughty. It was a sin against God, to do what mother told you not; and you have done a great many naughty things. God knows everything you have ever done. He knows all about you; but 'He loves' you 'better' even 'than He knows' you.*—loves you far more than father or mother, or anyone can love you. And He knows you are sorry, and He forgives you. Can't you thank Him for being so good to you?"

"Yes" said Lizzie, while the tears were gently falling on the little white hands folded on the coverlet.

"You know God *could not* tell a lie, Lizzie. He means every word He says."

"Yes, I know He does. Oh! I do hope I *shall* be a good girl. I will try when I go home."

"Why not try now Lizzie? Begin to-day. Don't wait till you go home."

The child looked up inquiringly.

"You have pain to bear sometimes; when it comes, ask God to make you patient. Try to bear it cheerfully. Jesus bore a great deal of pain for you. Try never to say a sharp, angry word, because Jesus never did. Try and copy Him. Now Lizzie, I have said enough for to-day. You have plenty to think about for such a little girl."

"I should like please to say one thing before you go. Did God let me be run over because I was naughty?"

"If you had done what mother told you, you would

**Keble.*

have gone home safely perhaps; but you see, when you disobeyed her, you ran into danger. God has sent you this trouble, not because He is angry with you now, but because He wants to make you sorry for being naughty. He wants to make you remember never to disobey mother again. That is one lesson for you, dear child; there may be many others, but I shall not stay any longer to-day. God bless you, and help you."

Stepping forward to the centre of the room, the Rector read a few verses of the Bible, and then kneeling, said a few words of earnest prayer; then with the parting blessing, he left the children. But the memory of that visit went not. There were words left behind which could not be forgotten, little words, easily uttered, yet which live for ever. And as the Rector walked briskly along the road from the Hospital, his thoughts were lingering behind, and with a half-sigh, he breathed the earnest prayer.

"LORD! give us all the faith of a little child!"



CHAPTER V.

Ludworth Rectory stood in the midst of a pleasant garden on the south side of the Parish Church; a high wall and shady trees separating it from the enclosed space within the Church gates, which shut out the ordinary traffic of the street, with the exception of a path-way under the shadow of the Rectory wall.

Mr. Mayne had been the Rector for about twelve years, and during that time, he had done great things in the small town. Five years ago, the Church was re-opened, after a grand work of Restoration, and the new schools, so long needed, were completed, just before the story begins.

But we were speaking just now about the Rectory—and what a pleasant Rectory it was! Its doors were ever open to receive all who sought advice and help. It was indeed a home where everyone found a welcome, and where all were greeted with a kindly word.

The house is quieter than it was in other days. Years ago there were children's voices echoing through the rooms—children's foot-steps, and merry peals of laughter, making the home bright and happy. But those sounds were gone; of the four children who were so loved and treasured, one only has been left. The eldest son went to

distant lands, seeking a home and occupation far away. Fondly had the father hoped to keep him in the old country, and to have trained him for the high calling to which *he* had been dedicated. But it could not be, and with many an earnest, anxious thought and prayer, the Rector yielded to his son's entreaties that he might go out into the wide world. And so it was, that Charles Mayne, the eldest of the family, sailed away to join some relations who were settled in New Zealand. Then there were two fair-haired children, a boy and girl, who were all life and brightness, and full of joyous glee. Everyone loved to hear their merry voices, and to see their little sunny faces.—But their came a day when the bright eyes grew dim. A dark cloud gathered over the Rectory home. The child-voices were hushed, and the light child footsteps were listened for in vain.

Those were sad days. The homes of the poor were desolated, and the homes of the rich did not escape, for a dreadful fever raged in the town, and with heavy hearts, people heard, first, that the children at the Rectory were stricken with the fever, and then, that the two had died.

Yes! in the thoughts of many, it was pale Death that had withered the opening flowers; but to the hearts of the sorrowing parents there had come a whisper of hope; and they could thank God for sending His messenger to carry their treasures to the Home-land above. And they could thank Him too for the one who was left to them; the fair, happy little Alice, who seemed now to claim all their care.

She was ten years old, but more like twelve in her

thoughts and ways. Having no child-companions, she was left with those who were older, and so naturally caught a somewhat graver, quieter tone, than children are wont to have.

Mrs. Mayne was sitting in the room where she and her little girl usually did the morning lessons. Work was over, and now came the happy hour when Alice and her mother would either have a walk, or stay in the shady garden. For the winter days are gone again, and a bright July sun was streaming in through the half-closed windows which led into the garden.

"Run and fetch your hat, Alice, and come with me into the garden," said Mrs. Mayne, as she stepped out of the window. Alice needed no second hint, and quickly re-appearing, she ran out and joined her mother in the bright sunshine.

Mrs. Mayne was amongst her flowers, cutting the sweetest and best she could find, and placing them carefully in a basket.

"Oh! Mother, mayn't I help you?" cried Alice.

"Yes, dear, you may gather some flowers if you like, for it is the Hospital day, and I shall take them this afternoon."

"I should so like to go with you," was Alice's next remark, while she busied herself with the flowers.

"Not to-day, dear," replied her mother. "You must have your walk with Mary this afternoon, and perhaps I will take you out with me to-morrow."

"Oh! Mother, I would so much rather go with *you*. Please let me!"

"Whose discontented little voice do I hear? Somebody will have to take walks with Mary every day for a week, if she talks like that!" said a cheerful voice, close behind Alice.

"Oh Papa!" and the child's face grew bright in a moment. Dropping her basket, she followed her parents to a shady seat under the trees.

"I wonder if a certain little girl has done her lessons well, and deserves a treat."

Mr. Mayne looked inquiringly at his wife, and Alice was all attention. "Because I intend going down to Milstone to-morrow, and should like Alice to come with us if she has been good."

"Oh! Father! To the sea—how delightful! May I go Mother dear?"

"Would a day at the sea-side make Alice more careful about her sums, I wonder?"

"Oh! yes, I really *am* going to try, Mother," said Alice, looking down, for the words recalled an unhappy struggle she had had that very morning.

"I hope so. And now run away to your flowers, Alice. See! you have left them to fade in the sun."

Re-assured by her mother's smile, Alice bounded across the lawn, and was soon at her work again.

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Not many miles from Ludworth was the small fishing-

village of Milstone, nestling in a little bay, and sheltered by tall, rocky cliffs. The place was not much frequented, as it was not on a line of railway; the shops were few and poor, and the inhabitants of Milstone were simple and primitive in the extreme.

No one ever dreamt of striking out in a new line; for what was right in the eyes of past generations must be right always, and all new things *must* be evil! So argued the good folk of Milstone, even when there sprang up, some two years ago, a Convalescent Home; the grand monument of one who passed through a life of suffering to a life of rest, leaving a blessed legacy for the weak and weary. Many a one who had entered the Home, cast down in body and spirit with the hard life-struggle, had left it in health and strength, while many a weak and suffering one had drunk in new vigour and life with the pure, fresh breeze from the sea. All through the summer months, the Home was full, and not until the close of November did the last of the patients quit its friendly shelter.

The summer of which we are speaking was an unusually warm one. The season had begun early; and this month of July found the Home as full as possible, with every prospect of a long succession of patients. But there was one inmate of the Home, on whom the fresh sea breezes played in vain; one whom all the care and watchful nursing failed to restore to health.

When the cold, winter days passed away, and the soft,

spring breeze stirred the trees, every one hoped that the warm sunshine would bring new life and strength to the little sick child, Lizzie Norton. She so far recovered from her accident, that she was able to leave the Hospital; but after reaching a certain point, she made no way. The children's voices in her home, were more than she could bear; she never joined the others in their play, and the pale, patient face of the child spoke of weakness and weariness, painful to see in one so young. As the summer drew on, it was settled that the child must be sent to Milstone, with the hope that the sea air might do great things for her. A fortnight had now gone by; and still there was no change for the better in the little one. Meanwhile, she, with her gentle, winning ways, had gained the hearts of all who were in the Home. If one more weak than herself needed help, it was Lizzie who would be at hand to do the kind action. Always bright and cheerful, she seemed to cast a light upon the lives around her. Sometimes indeed, a shade of sadness would cross her face, and on being asked what made her unhappy, she would answer: "I was only thinking of father and mother at home."

But the cloud would soon go, and the sunshine would return. And so the summer days glided on.

CHAPTER VI.

IT was a lovely morning. Light, fleecy clouds decked the deep blue sky, and a soft breeze stirred amongst the leafy trees. The white cliffs of Milstone were gleaming in the sun-light, keeping guard over the little bay. The sea, bright and sparkling, stretched away, far as the eye could reach, while at the foot of the cliffs, it broke in tiny ripples on the golden sand.

Strange sea ! so peaceful now, so calm, so bright, that a child may play fearlessly beside its waters ; and yet with all the calmness, so vast, so deep, so full of awful mystery, that the spirit of man is lost in rapt amazement as he contemplates it. For the sea speaks to us of the infinite, and is a link between the human spirit and the Divine.

Ever changing sea ! smooth and calm to-day ; and to-morrow tossing its waves in wild fury at the foot of those silent rocks, unmoved by the rush and roar of the waters below. So like a human life ! now bright, unruffled, full of joy, and peace ; now tempest-tost, and well nigh sinking amid the waves of sorrow. Thoughts akin to these might have been passing through the mind of a silent watcher, standing on those cliffs alone. His face was grave, and full of thought, not to say sadness, as his eyes wandered afar over the waste of waters. Was it that the sea hid

from his sight a cherished life? Or that those waves separated him from a loved one in far off lands, whose life might be worse than death.

Time flew on. And the man started from his reverie, and quickly walked away from the sea, towards the village.

It was Mr. Mayne. On reaching Milstone an hour ago, he had left his wife and child at the Parsonage, and now he was going to rejoin them for the luncheon hour. The Vicar of Milstone was away, and in his absence Mr. Mayne had undertaken to look after some of the poor people; so partly for this reason, and partly to see little Lizzie Norton, he had come to Milstone to-day. Mrs. Pelham, the Vicar's wife, and her two children were at home; and it was Alice's great delight to have a day with her young friends. As soon as luncheon was over, the children went out into the garden. While they are at play, let us take a look at them. The eldest, Frank, is a fair, bright-looking boy, of about fourteen, with honest blue eyes, sparkling with fun and merriment. A true boy he; fearless, unselfish, and manly; one who could look you full in the face, and whom you could trust.

Edith was eleven years old, with fair hair and blue eyes; she was pretty, but lacked the open, straightforward expression so attractive in her brother.—A reader of character would have found something in those features which would have made him hesitate as to what the future might unfold.

Mr. Pelham was a grave, quiet man; inclined to be

severe, and utterly unable to gain the confidence of his children. He had very poor health, and was often obliged to leave his Parish. His wife, on the other hand, was all brightness and energy; almost too energetic, people said; to her had been left the sole management of the children, and affairs in general. Frank who was at school was now home for the holidays; and Edith did lessons with her mother.

After an hour's play, the children grew tired of the garden, and, as Alice longed to go down to the sea beach, Edith was sent into the house to ask for leave to go.

Mrs. Mayne followed her out into the garden.

"Mother," said Alice darting to her side, "we may go to the sands, mayn't we? I've not seen the sea to-day, and we do so want to go."

"It's now half-past three, dears, so you had better start at once. Frank, your mother tells me, you are quite sure to take good care of the little girls. I must give them into your charge," replied Mrs. Mayne smiling. "And don't stay away too long, for we shall have tea early, and must go home in good time, as your father has to attend a meeting to-night, Alice."

"But I should like to see Lizzie," pleaded Alice.

"You can't do everything, dear child! Your Papa is going to the Home this afternoon, and if you go for your walk, there won't be time for all."

"Oh! never mind Lizzie," interrupted Edith impatiently. "Surely you can wait till she goes home, and we can't

have you any day. Oh! do come to the sands! we'll have such fun!"

A shade of disappointment crossed Alice's face; but she quickly yielded to her companions, and perhaps no one but her mother guessed how hard the momentary struggle was.

"Well, if you are going, you had better run away children; and don't be late. I shouldn't wonder if we have a shower before very long. The clouds seem gathering. However you are close to the beach, and I would not wander far, if I were you."

As the three children ran down the garden path, Mrs. Mayne stood watching them till they were out of sight, and then returned to the house.

"Why Alice!" exclaimed Frank, while Edith was loitering behind, "I do believe you'd rather go to see that sick child than come and play! Now, speak the truth." And the boy looked wonderingly at his little companion. She was much smaller than he, and he had to stoop to see her face.

"Well Frank! partly yes! but no, I *do* want to come with you; only I want to see Lizzie too. Poor Lizzie can't run about as we can, and I'm so sorry for her. And she likes me to go and see her sometimes."

"I shouldn't wonder" replied Frank drily. "But Alice, you *are* a queer girl!"

"Am I?" asked she simply.

"Queer, do you mean, because I like to do what I like?"

"Well" laughed the boy, "no, not exactly that. No, but you're different from Edie.—I wonder why. Come Edie! Don't be an hour getting to the beach. I'm off!" And away rushed the three, down the sloping road that led to the sands.

"Low water!" cried Alice. "Oh! I am sorry!"

"Coming up fast" sang out Frank in a cheery tone. "We'll soon have the waves near enough!"

Full of glee, the children sped along. Oh! the joy of freedom; of knowing they were alone, and could go where they would.

Merrily they chattered away, Frank revealing some of the mysteries of his school-life, and astonishing his listeners with wild tales of adventure.

The shore near Milstone was irregular; the cliffs running out some distance on the northern side of the bay, were broken by numerous little bays and coves:—very wild and picturesque, but dangerous to strangers who were not familiar with the coast. The children had soon got past one or two of these little promontories, and wandered on more slowly in search of shells and bright sea-weeds.

"Round the rugged rocks!" cried Frank, as they gained another point. "Once round this corner, and we are in Alice's favourite cove."

"Come Alice! Make haste Edie; we shall soon reach our cave." That was to be the goal.

There it was, a narrow opening in the cliff, which led

into a moderate-sized cave, a few feet above the sandy shore. Climbing up a low ledge of rock, they found themselves in the dim cave, with its rough, rocky floor, strewn with shells and straggling sea-weeds.

"Now I'm going to explore every corner of the cave!" cried Alice in great delight, as she made her way from crag to crag, jumping across the narrow fissures in the rock, and not unfrequently plunging by mistake into a little pool of salt water. And the time flew swiftly on. Suddenly Alice came to a stand-still. "What time is it?" she asked. Frank ran to the opening of the cave, and looked at his watch.

"Why Alice! Edith! what do you think! It's half-past five." "Tea time!" cried Edith—"Oh what will they say? But Frank, what's the matter; and why do you look like that?"

"Half-past five," he repeated hurriedly, "and high-water at seven." He rushed out of the cave in breathless haste. "Why, there's plenty of time, surely," said Alice, "if it's not high-water till seven, we shall easily get past the rocks, shan't we?"

"Not *plenty* of time; but we shall do it if we run. Come Alice! Oh! never mind those things," exclaimed Frank hastily, as Alice began to gather up her treasures. Off they started. Plenty of good, firm sand before them. But the tide was coming in fast, and the waves were drawing nearer.

They reached one of the rocky points and rounded it.

"See Frank! we are all right," exclaimed Alice merrily. "And never mind the tea."

"Look there!" said Frank, pointing to the cliff in front of them, which the sea had nearly reached.

"Take hold of my hand, both of you. Now, run! for beyond is yet another point to pass."

The children saw the need for haste. Some yards further they had run, scarcely pausing to take breath.

"I'm so tired Frank! I *can't* go on," said Edith at last.

"You must, or we shan't get home to-night. Cling on to me."

"I can't Frank" was the next piteous plea. "Do let me rest a minute!" as he half dragged his sister forward. At last she stopped, and sank down. What was to be done? Leave her, and run for help?

"Try once more, little one," pleaded he, "we shall soon be at the corner, and then"—he stopped. He knew that was not the worst.

"Alice, I must leave you both, and run for help."

"Leave us! Oh! Frank, never!" cried Edith pitifully. "I daren't be left. Oh! that dreadful sea!" and the child shivered. And Alice recalled those words of Frank, so lightly spoken, as they started,—“The sea will be near enough soon!” But she only said quietly, “Hadn't you better leave us Frank? I'll take care of you Edith; and then help will come.”

"But the sea will be up directly.—Oh! no Frank, you mustn't go!"

"I'll just run to that point, and take a look round," he answered. Then he came back to them, and his face told them all.

"We are too late," he said. "The sea is up, and the waves are breaking over the rocks. By the time we reached the further point, I could not carry you round."

Edith was seized with terror. "What *shall* we do! Oh Frank! I'm so frightened."

The boy looked troubled.

"Let me think."

Go back to the cave? No; for had they not seen the salt water standing there? But possibly that might be just high-water mark. At any rate, they must not stay where they were. There was the dark water-line some feet up the cliff side; they must hurry back to the cave, unless indeed some way were found of climbing up the cliff.

Meanwhile, a breeze had sprung up. The clouds had gathered. The waves drew nearer, nearer. And the poor children were well-nigh spent with weariness and fear.

"We must go back," said Frank at last. "Come on gently, Alice. Stay Edie, let me carry you a little way."

And so they retraced their steps along the narrowing sand.

Frank remembered a dry ledge of rock, within the cave, where the children might be safely placed. But how many hours must pass before they could reach home! And what hours of anxiety and fear for those who waited for them!

These thoughts passed rapidly through the children's minds, but the present fear was more pressing. At last they gained the cave. Frank lifted first one, and then the other upon the ledge of rock. Then he took off his coat, and wrapped it round them. For the cave felt damp and chilly to the frightened children.

Time dragged slowly on. They sat or crouched, motionless, listening to the fast in-coming sea. At length the waves were washing below the opening of the cave. The spray came dashing in, wetting the children's feet.

"Is it nearly seven?" asked Alice faintly.

"A quarter past six" was the short reply.

"Are you frightened Frank? Shall we be drowned?"

"I'm afraid of you falling off that ledge," said he evasively. What he *was* afraid of, was, lest the children should really faint through fear, and fall. As for the danger, he believed there was none, as the water-mark was below the children's feet.

The cave grew darker, and at last the water flowed in. Not a sound was to be heard, save the dull, ceaseless splash of the waves, as they rose and rose.

The children sat clinging to one another, while Frank stood just below them on another narrow ledge.

Seven o'clock, and the water came higher and higher!

CHAPTER VII.

THE short afternoon passed all too quickly to Mr. Mayne, who had several people to see at Milstone. First, there was the Home to be visited, and there he went with Mrs. Mayne, who stayed out in the garden where Lizzie Norton was sitting, while her husband went in to minister to the patients.

The flush of pleasure and surprise that came over Lizzie's face as her kind friends went up to her, quickly paled again, leaving the little face very white and weary-looking.

"You are not much better I fear, my little one," said Mrs. Mayne in a gentle tone.

"I heard the Doctor say I was rather better yesterday. But I do feel *so* tired. I think I shall be glad to go home."

"But don't you like the bright, beautiful sea, Lizzie? You can sit here, and watch the ships, and the blue waves, even if you can't run about much, and the matron is very kind; I'm sure you are very happy here," was the cheerful reply.

"Oh! yes, very ma'am," answered the child. "But I get to thinking about father and mother and all of them;

and then I don't know how to stop away any longer." And Lizzie looked wistfully into Mrs. Mayne's kind face. Yet after all, what a home her's was! The father by no means steady, in spite of all his promises and efforts. The mother at her wits end to make the money hold out; cross, bad tempered, always at work, and worn out for want of rest; the children, noisy, rough, and disobedient, and everything as dark and wretched as it could be.

No wonder Mrs. Mayne sighed, as she met the sad, patient eyes of the little girl.

"I have some good news for you Lizzie! Suppose instead of your going home, mother comes to spend a day with you, here!"

"Oh! that *would* be nice! when may she come? Oh! how kind you are!" and the child's voice was bright and joyous in a moment.

"This is Friday. Well, Monday is a busy day, isn't it? And so is Tuesday; and Wednesday is market-day. Why Lizzie, it will have to be Thursday; that's the day the carrier comes you know. Perhaps by that time you'll be stronger, and able to walk about with mother."

"Oh! how I shall count the days. Thank you, dear, good lady!" And the child took Mrs. Mayne's hand, and kissed it again and again. "But" added she, "I don't think I *shall* be better.—Never again perhaps, and that's why I do so want to go home."

"And you *shall* go home before very long, dear child. But you would like to get well, Lizzie; and the doctor

says it is so good for you being at the sea."

"Yes. I should like to get well, and play again, as I used to. At least I think so," said the child softly. "But I heard them say this morning that I shouldn't be here long. Did that mean that I am going to die?"

"We cannot tell that Lizzie. No one but God knows how long you and I have to live here. But if we love our Father in Heaven, and try to please Him, we need not be afraid; because you know He loves us so much, that He will always do what is best for us."

The child listened attentively, her large eyes fixed on Mrs. Mayne's face.

"But I should be very much afraid to die. I don't want to leave you all and go away right alone. Can't mother come too?"

She had nearly added "and father?" But something made her pause.

"You won't be alone, my child, for the dear Lord who loves little children, will be with you, and He will take care of you, as He does now, every day. But now I'm going to read you a nice little story."

And so an hour passed away, very pleasantly, after which Mrs. Mayne said good-bye to the child, and returned to the Vicarage.

Close to the open window of the drawing room, Mrs. Mayne and Mrs. Pelham were seated at their work.

It was six o'clock.

"How late the children are!" suddenly exclaimed Mrs.

Pelham, glancing towards the door. As she spoke, it was opened by Mr. Mayne.

"Are you alone?" asked his wife. "We concluded the children must have joined you, as Alice was so anxious to see her little sick friend, Lizzie Norton."

Mr. Mayne and his wife exchanged uneasy glances.

"I have seen nothing of them," replied he gravely. "Where can they have gone? I must look for them at once.—You had better stay here, Laura," as his wife was rising hastily in her wish to accompany him. "I will just run down to the beach, and there I shall find them, the young truants!" So saying he walked quickly out, and was soon on the road. Some time having elapsed since he had quitted the Home, Mr. Mayne first went there to ascertain if the children had taken it, on their way from the shore. No one however had seen them near the place. So he hurried back to the shore, where he found the tide coming in very fast, and one or two fishermen drawing their boats up the shingle, to make them high and dry.

"We shall have a high tide to-night Sir!" said one of the men. He knew these men, and at once inquired if they had seen the children during the afternoon.

"Well Sir!" returned the older man of the two. "Let's see! No, I can't say as I have seen 'em, but now I think on it, my missus *did* come home at tea-time, and she was telling me as how she'd seen the young ladies and master Frank walking along the sands this afternoon."

"What time? Which way did they go, Brown?"

"Why Sir, they were going yon way," replied the old man, jerking his finger in the direction the children had taken.

"Towards Hood's Cave?" was the hurried question.

"Sure, yes Sir! But now don't go for to be thinking they've ever gone *there*! Why master Frank surely would know better than that Sir!" And the boat-man looked up in alarm.

"Anyhow they've not been seen. Are you ready to help me, Brown, and at once?" Mr. Mayne spoke calmly, striving to suppress the agitation which well-nigh unmanned him.

"A boat Sir?"

"A boat. Make haste!"

No need to say that. Before long, all was ready.

"But Sir," the boatman paused—"what are you going to do?"

Keep near shore, and if we don't find them, search the cave."

"We can't get the boat in this side Sir,—and the far opening on the sea-ward side of the rock can only be entered at high tide."

"That will take longer time," almost groaned the Rector.

"But put out at once, and make for the cave."

The wind had got round to the sea, and the tide was flowing fast.

The boat grated along the shingle, and was pushed out

to sea. She rose and sank over the swelling waves.

The men began to pull, and in the stern of the boat sat Mr. Mayne, listening as in a dream, to the plash of the oars. Along the coast-line, the waves were breaking in white foam. Sun-lit clouds brightened the evening sky, and the westering sun cast a line of light over the sea.

But the beauty of the evening was lost on him, who with straining eyes scanned eagerly the line of coast, in vain. No trace of living being was there to be seen, save where now and then a sea-bird with flapping wings broke the solitude of that lonely hour.

At last they neared the cave.

"Pull hard!" shouted Brown. "Make for the seaward opening! Now Sir!" As Mr. Mayne mechanically took an oar.

Against wind and tide they pulled. It was for life or death they knew. It was hard work. But they gained at last the further entrance, and over deep waters, the boat was borne safely into the cave which was dark and chill, save where the light, kindled by the boatmen, cast a faint, flickering reflection over the black still waters.

The boat glided on, further,—within the deepening shadows of the cave. The water grew more shallow, and far ahead, darted in a ray of light from the landward opening. Half in light, and half in shadow lay a dark object on a narrow ledge of rock. Then a faint cry! A movement, —a sudden splash into the waters beneath. Another cry—a struggle—and a strong arm stretched out in help!

CHAPTER VIII.

A GROUP of women were standing in Gray's Court, close to the house where the Nortons lived. Their voices were loud, their gestures vehement. Evidently there was some dispute going on.

"I tell you it's false!" cried one in a decided tone. "And if you talk till night, I won't believe you. It's a crying shame to raise such a tale against the lad. If I were you, Mrs. Norton, I'd say nothing more to whoever spread it. I'd trust your Jack as soon as I'd trust myself, as sure as my name's Betsey Parker!"

For the speaker was the same enthusiastic neighbour who figured in our early pages.

"Say what you will, neighbour," retorted another woman. "It's as true as I'm here, Jack stole the money, though I'm sure I'm right sorry for *you*, Mrs. Norton. It's a awful thing to think on! And you his mother too! I hope it'll be a lesson to him," added the loquacious neighbour.

"And I should like to know who wants *your* comfort," retorted Betsey, sharply, "and however *you* got hold of the tale!"

"I see a perliceman catch hold of the boy, and he took him right away in less than no time!" was the triumphant reply.

"And who cares for the perlice, I should like to know? not Betsey Parker! How can the perlice know anything as are always out of the way when they're wanted? I say Jack Norton's as innocent as our Rector! There!"

After which unhesitating vindication, Betsey hied her head high in the air, and walked away. At that moment Norton came into the Court, looking moody and vexed.

"Here's a pretty go, wife," began he in a surly tone, as they went into the house together.

"But what on earth do you stand gossiping there for? Isn't dinner ready?"

"What's the matter, Jem? Have *you* heard anything? What's all this about Jack?" And the wife began bustling about, setting the table for dinner, and clattering the knives and forks.

"The matter? You may well ask that," was the angry reply. "The lad will go to the lock-up, and serve him right too—the young rascal! I hope he'll repent of this piece of work."

"Then he *has* robbed the master. Oh! Jem, I say it is hard. What *shall* we do? how much did he take?"

"Take? why all he could get, to be sure. There's seventeen shillings and sixpence missing from Mr. Bond's drawer, and the lad has pocketed it all! I should like to give him a thrashing!"

Mrs. Norton sat down, and burst into tears.

"Things *do* go against us," sobbed she. "Who'd have thought it! Jack'll be turned out of the school, and I

shall loose the washing!"

"I wish you'd talk sense, and get my dinner ready; and I'll make all square with Master Jack! we'll have no more of his tricks. There's a nice tale about in the town to-day, Mary," added the man, suddenly changing the subject.

"What's that?" inquired the wife eagerly. "*Another* tale?"

"I can't say how far it's true. But they say as Miss Alice is drowned, and the young lady and gent from Milstone Vicarage as well."

"And you sit there, and talk in *that* cool way! Well, I never *did* see a man like you, Norton. What do you mean? and how was it all?"

"They say as how the young folks all went off in a boat, and the boat capsized, and they all got lost. But mind you, I can't think it's a fact, only something must be up. Perhaps they've got a bit of a wetting; that's enough to set the gossips going!"

And as he spoke, Norton seized his hat, leaving his untouched dinner on the table.

"Are you going, Jem? Why you've not had one bite, and there's a nice pasty in the oven, such as you like!"

"I'm off. And you'll see me when I come home," was the vague reply.

"Going to the shop?"

"No. To the 'Royal Oak.'"

So saying the man sauntered out, banging the door behind him. Within the little cottage sat the poor wife, heavy-

hearted, miserable.

"Oh! Lizzie, Lizzie," moaned she. "What *will* you say! I could wish you had left this world of trouble! Poor little one! I wish your mother was like you, little, innocent lamb!"

Having tidied up the little kitchen, Mrs. Norton put on her bonnet and left the house. She was fully resolved to be at the truth of these sad reports, for her heart yearned over her poor boy, and she was scarcely less anxious to know what had happened to the dear young lady at the Rectory. Thither she first bent her steps.

The servant who came to the door quickly disarmed her fears.

"Miss Alice is safe and well, except a cold," was the answer to Mrs. Norton's enquiry. "And mistress brought her home yesterday. Miss Pelham is quite well, but Mr. Frank is very bad. They are afraid he's got the rheumatic fever; he must have been a good time in the water. But wont you come in and sit down a bit, Mrs. Norton?"

"Thank you," replied the other, stepping into the kitchen.

"Oh! dear me—what a time of it the poor Rector must have had, to say nothing of his dear lady.—Well! it's a blessing Miss Alice is safe."

"Aye. It's been a near go and no mistake."

Leaving the kitchen, we will take a glance at another part of the Rectory. It was about three o'clock, and the

Rector, having been detained at home by visitors, was sitting by the drawing room window, with his little girl on his knee. An expression of deep thankfulness, and quiet happy joy lighted up his features, as he fondly stroked the fair little head resting on his shoulder.

Mrs. Mayne was at the piano, playing soft, dreamy music such as they loved.

"How I do love my dear home, father!" said Alice at last, breaking a long silence.

"God has been very good in bringing you back to it again, little one," replied her father, softly. "My child does not know what this home would be to me, if she were gone."

"Papa! I have so often wondered about one thing. Why did you not punish me for being so naughty? I ought never to have gone so far away that day; and I made you and mother so unhappy."

"I think my Alice *has* suffered, has she not? I cannot think she will *ever* forget this lesson."

"Poor Frank suffers," returned the child sadly. "And oh! father, did he not save me when I was in the water? Poor dear Frank! I hope he will get well."

"He certainly tried to save your life; but I can hardly guess how long he may have been in the water. You were picked up by your father, but Frank was not found for some little time after that. Edith was the only one who escaped the water. You must either have fainted, or dropped asleep, and then have fallen."

"I remember lying at the bottom of the boat, papa. I saw nothing but your face and the sky—and I thought you looked different from what I had ever seen you look before. And at last, I think I went to sleep. But have you forgiven me altogether, father?" added the child, who longed to hear the re-assuring word. Her father bent down, and kissed the child's brow.

"Mother and I forgave you long ago, Alice; and they thank God for giving back their child to them. Will she try to offer the life thus lengthened to Him?"

"Yes Papa," whispered Alice, kissing him. And again there was a silence. Presently the child slipped off her father's knee, and as he rose from his seat, Mrs. Mayne approached them.

"Are you going out to-day?" inquired she of her husband.

"Yes, dear. I must see Bond about this unhappy business. Do you know I have serious doubts about those Nortons, and as to the advisability of keeping him at the organ-blowing. He is so unsatisfactory, and the example is so bad!"

"I know it. But do let us wait awhile. It seems to me this is our one hold upon the man. If he were not compelled, he would never come to church. We must keep him till after the Mission."

"You are right," observed the Rector promptly. "And as you say, it is our one hope of reaching the poor man.—As to this boy Jack, who has stolen the money, we must

consider what shall be done!"

Mr. Mayne moved towards the door. Alice flew after him to find his gloves.

"Thank you little one. Now go and have a walk with mother."

So saying, he went forth on his work of loving service amongst the poor, to bear the message of warning and comfort in his Master's name.

It was decided that Jack Norton should be punished with a severe horse-whipping. The boy had made a full confession of his theft, and had implicated none of his companions. And it was judged that the disgrace of prison would be more calculated to harden his character, than to produce real repentance for the sin.

Moreover it was a first offence. The boy had been thoroughly honest hitherto, and his penitence seemed sincere.

The schoolmaster, who had the real interests of his boys at heart, spared no pains in trying to convince the poor lad of the sinfulness of the theft. And the Rector, with his unflinching firmness, mixed with kindness, strove to bring home a life-lesson which should never be forgotten.



CHAPTER IX.

WEEEKS passed on. August came and went, and September. Little change was there in Gray's Court. Lizzie Norton was at home again, no better for her long sojourn at the sea-side; and as the days grew chilly, the child's strength waned, and a bad cough came on. By degrees, she did less and less, and at last, the sick child's place downstairs was empty, and she could not leave her bed.

Lizzie was glad when she was told to stay upstairs, for she could not bear the children's noise below, and she only wanted rest and quiet. The little life was passing gently away. The flower that seemed to be fading on earth, would ere long be blooming in sweet fragrance above.

It was one afternoon in October. And Mrs. Norton was seated, silent and sad, by the bed-side of her child. The room was clean and cheerful, and a few autumn flowers brought by loving hands to the sick child, brightened the little table by the window. Lizzie had had a long sleep, having been tired out after a restless night: and the mother had taken the opportunity of doing her work below, and had then brought her sewing upstairs, in case Lizzie should awake and want anything. At last the eyes opened, and rested with a loving expression on the mother's face.

"Will you have something to drink, dear?" asked Mrs.

Norton, looking up.

"Please. I'm so thirsty. Oh! that *is* nice, mother. Thank you."

"Your teacher brought you that nice lemon-water, Lizzie. She came while you were asleep."

"I wish I'd seen her," replied the child. "Do you think she will come again soon?"

"Perhaps to-morrow, deary. She sent her love to you, and she was so glad you were having a nice bit of sleep."

"Dear teacher! She *is* kind! Mother, I shall never go to Sunday School again. Never any more!"

"Don't, child! I can't bear to hear you talk like that. I can't let you go and leave me."

And the tears fell on the work which lay on Mrs. Norton's lap.

"I used to be afraid," Lizzie went on. "I thought I dare not die, but I don't think it will be so hard. I don't want to leave *you* though, mother dear."

The tears fell faster.

"Please don't cry, mother. You will come too, some day, and father, and all; and we shall never be naughty and unhappy any more up There!" continued the sick child.

"But how are we ever to get There?" asked Mrs. Norton sadly.

"My little hymn at the Sunday School says how, mother.

'He only can unlock the gate
Of Heaven, and let us in.'

That's the Lord Jesus, teacher says. And I think He'll let me in, mother," added the child simply.

"I'm sure of that, child. But there's such a deal to be done before we are ready for Heaven."

'And trust in His redeeming Blood,
And try His works to do.'

said Lizzie softly, going on with her hymn.

"I'm sure I've done little enough mother, that's *good*, I mean. But I've been a deal of trouble to you, and I'm so sorry."

"You've been our real bit of comfort, Lizzie, ever since you were born," sobbed the poor mother. "But there! I'm making you cry, and you'll be tired, so we won't talk any more now. Lie still, deary, and let me shake up your pillow a bit." She did so, and the child sank back exhausted, and closed her eyes, while her breath came and went quickly.

"I am faint, mother—Where am I? Perhaps I am going." and her words died away in a whisper.

Presently she spoke again, "Is it you, mother? I thought you were all in white, and I heard such sweet music."

"The Church Bells dear, ringing for service."

"They are calling mother. Let me go."

Meanwhile, as the child's life was ebbing fast, what was the effect on Norton's mind? What were his thoughts and actions in the near presence of the unseen world? He spent but little of his time at home, in Lizzie's room.

His presence seemed to trouble her ; and the sight of her patient suffering made him irritable and morose. His sorrow at the thought of losing her was intense ; but it was the dark agony of despair, which hardened, and made him reckless.

In vain did the Rector seek him out, and try to shew him that the Father in Heaven was calling His child Home, and that the sorrow was sent to draw them all nearer to their loving Lord. Poor Norton heard, but heeded not, and time after time, the Rector with a full heart left the cottage,—sad, as he thought of the darkness, happy, as his mind's eye rested on the pale little face upstairs, bright with the light from a purer world than this.

One day about a week after the conversation first related between Lizzie and her mother, there was a gentle tap at the cottage door, and the welcome voice of Mr. Mayne, summoned Mrs. Norton down-stairs.

"How is the dear child to-day?" enquired he kindly.

"Since yesterday, she seems to have taken a bit of a turn, Sir, thank you. It's a wonder to me to see her take so much more notice, and her voice is a deal stronger to-day."

"Has she slept?"

"Yes Sir, she slept like a baby last night, and she's taken her food quite nicely to-day. Do walk up, Sir! she'll be that pleased to see you."

Ascending the narrow stairs, the Rector found himself

in the little room where the sick child lay. He softly drew near to the bed, the spotlessly clean coverlet of which, was scarcely more white than the little wan face on the pillow.

What a bright smile greeted that loved and kind friend as he approached !

"God bless you, dear child!" were his earnest words, as he took her thin hand into his own. "You are not in pain to-day."

"Oh! no," was the reply, "I feel better, thank you. Mother says I'm ever so much better.—But" added she quickly, "I'm not going to get well. Mother says I am, but I'm not. Only she likes to think I shall."

"Should you like to stay with us longer, Lizzie?" asked the Rector gently, as he gazed at the sweet little face.

"No, I think not. I don't seem at all afraid now; and I want to go to the beautiful Home you have told me about, where the Lord Jesus is." And a far away look came into the clear blue eyes, as though they rested on an unseen light.

The Rector felt unwilling to break the silence; but ere long, the child spoke again.

"Will you tell me something about the Mission, please? I heard my teacher ask mother yesterday, to go to the Mission. What did she mean?"

"Won't it tire you if I tell you about it?"

"Oh! no, I want to hear, so much."

In a few simple words, Mr. Mayne told the child how

there was to be a Mission next month ; that two Clergymen were coming from a long way off, to preach to the people at Ludworth ; and tell them about God, and help them all to be good. That for a long time past, a great many people had been asking God to bless the Mission, and to turn many sinners to Himself.

"There will be many Services in the Churches every day, and we are asking God to bring all the people there, where they may be taught the way to Heaven," added Mr. Mayne.

Lizzie's eyes were fixed on the Rector as he spoke.

"Oh ! how I should like to help the Mission !" exclaimed she earnestly. "But I can do nothing lying here." "Oh ! yes, you can, dear child," was the reply. "Ask God to draw many souls to Himself. Ask Him to teach all who come, to give up their sins, and turn to their Saviour. Pray for father and mother, and brothers, and all you love, and say this little prayer every day,—'Oh ! God, bless the Mission, and help all who come to it, for Jesus Christ's sake.' So you will be helping us, dear Lizzie, and will be doing a silent work for your Lord. Then when He calls you Home, you may find that your prayers have helped some one to love Him."

Thankfully the Rector perceived how entirely the child was taking in his words. Her spirit was indeed being ripened for the Angel Reaper.

Mr. Mayne knelt down, and the child, with folded hands repeated after him our Lord's own Prayer. Then he asked in simple words that God would wash her soul white in the

precious Blood of Jesus, and bring her safely home.

And rising from his knees, he stood for a moment, watching the little one.

"I am going now. Good-bye, my child. May God's Peace be with you!"

Passing softly out of the room, the Rector went down stairs, and the sick child was left alone.

. Days passed on, and the transitory gleam of hope again died away, as Norton and his wife watched the increasing languor of their child. Ever since that last recorded visit of Mr. Mayne, Lizzie had tried to use every opportunity for speaking to her father, and begging him to listen to the preaching of the Mission. For hours he would sit in the kitchen, with his face buried in his hands unable to bear the wistful, loving glance of those clear eyes, so soon to be closed in death.—Her words of earnest pleading, fell like a death-knell on his heart, when he listened to her voice. At last the end drew near. November had set in, and it wanted but a fortnight to the Mission.

But ere the Mission-call should ring through Ludworth Churches, the child's spirit would have answered the last solemn call from earth to the Land of Peace!

By Lizzie's special wish, she had said a last word of loving farewell to each of her brothers, and her little sister; and then she simply waited, calm and quiet, till her summons should come.

It was Sunday morning.

The sun streamed into the little room, and one bright sunbeam lighted up the features of the dying child. Mrs. Norton made a movement, as though to shade her with the curtain.

"No, mother" whispered Lizzie. "I love—the—light. I think—I am going—dear mother."

The words came slowly.

"Bells! I hear the Angels calling me. Come, Lord Jesus." The lips were parted in a smile; there was one more effort to speak,—and then the eyes closed, and all was still. The pale form was there, but the bright child-spirit was on its way to the Home of Rest.

The weeping mother folded two little white hands on the breast, and kissed the brow so lily-white, though not yet cold in death. Then she sank down by the bed-side, and was alone with her deep sorrow.

At length a sound in the room below aroused her. She got up and went downstairs. Norton was closing the door behind him, as he softly entered the house.

"Oh! Jem, she's gone!"

The man stared. He looked like one in a dream.

"Where have you been?" she asked.

"To Church. And then I came right home before the sermon."

"But you never came up to say you were going; and now, Jem, she'll never speak to us again."

"Wife! I tell you I *can't* bear it," groaned the poor father.

"Oh! it's a hard fate that strikes down my pretty little lamb!" And Norton sat down, while a dark, hard look settled on his face.

"Now don't Jem! If you'd seen our child as I have, and heard her pretty talk, you'd have thought there was something in her words." And the poor woman began to weep afresh. "If ever anyone went straight up to Heaven, our Lizzie's *there!*"

"That doesn't bring her back to me," murmured the man.

"She said as how we might go to her though, Jem," was the reply, spoken in a hesitating tone.

"Heaven's the place for the like of her, not me. No wife; it's too late for me now. I'm just going on as I am. But I will go up and look once more at the child,—and then"—He broke away; and before his wife could answer, he was gone. Anger, remorse, grief, rebellion against God's will, struggled within him, as he gazed on the silent, motionless form.

"Lizzie, child! why were you born? only to break your father's heart? Follow *you!* meet *you* again! No never! You are made to be an angel of light, I am dark, hopeless, hard.—No, nothing can change me *now*. If you had lived—I might,—but no, not *now!*"

The struggle was fierce and long. At last the man started forward, imprinted one long, last, passionate kiss on the pure calm brow, and then rushed downstairs, passed his wife without a word, and walked hurriedly

through Gray's Court, out into the street. People passed, and re-passed. He heeded not; he spoke to no one. On he went, not knowing, not caring whither.

..... A few days later, a little child was laid to rest in the quiet cemetery on a hill-side, just without the town.

There were mourners weeping round the little grave; but the Rector's eyes grew bright as they rested first on the lofty Church Spire, pointing Heaven-wards, and then rose higher, as though beyond the clouds they would follow the spirit's flight to "where beyond these voices, there is Peace."



CHAPTER X.

A FORTNIGHT passed away. There was an unusual stir in the quiet town of Ludworth. One topic was discussed. One interest seemed to be infused into the minds of all, both rich and poor. The Parish Church was open all day long ; the frequent services were attended by crowded congregations. Places of amusement were almost empty ; the shops and houses of business were closed early ; and people of all classes had caught the spirit of the Mission. For the long-looked for week had begun ;— The Mission Clergy had sounded the first notes of the Mission-call. Strengthened by prayer, they had come in the power of God, in firm faith that God would grant “ Showers of blessing.”

It was Tuesday ; the third day of the Mission. At seven o'clock the Church Bells rang out for the Mission Service at half-past seven. Already numbers had flocked into Church, and streams of men in working clothes were hurrying along the streets. A stranger might have been seen walking briskly down the High Street. Suddenly he stopped, in front of a bookseller's shop, attracted by a printed hand-bill. Entering, he asked : “ What's going on here ? ” of one of the men who was putting up the shutters.

"A Mission Sir. You're a stranger here," replied the tradesman respectfully.

"I am. Which way do I take for the Church?"

"First turn to your right Sir, and it is straight before you. There's a great preacher here Sir.—People come from far and near—Service at half-past seven."

The stranger thanked him and walked out of the shop. Not many minutes later, he found himself mingling with a crowd of people pressing into the Church Porch. He passed within the sacred building; out of the darkness, into the light. It was a grand sight that burst upon the stranger's eyes.

The graceful arches springing from their massive pillars, spoke of strength and beauty, while the noble proportions of the building seemed to remind one of the Majesty of Him who dwelt therein.

The Church was filling rapidly; and the stranger passing up the aisle, found a seat not far from the prayer desk. Presently the fine old organ pealed forth its harmonies, which rose and fell, and died away amidst the arches. A hymn was sung; then followed the short Mission Service; then another hymn: and the Mission-preacher went into the pulpit. His was a wonderful presence. Calmness and dignity,—the dignity of utter self-forgetfulness—unflinching firmness, bordering on severity, intense reality, combined to hold one entranced, and keep one spell-bound. Standing erect, in silence for a moment, the eyes of the preacher wandered over the

living mass of human souls, as they waited for God's message, and in that pause, the stranger raised his head, and for an instant, met the eye of the preacher.

The text was given out; and the words rang through the Church, clear, deep, and penetrating:—

“Thou art the man!”

After the sermon, a hymn was sung,—

“Just as I am, without one plea

But that Thy Blood was shed for me,

And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,

O Lamb of God, I come.”

More than a thousand voices caught up the strain:— hearts and voices alike uplifted in earnest, soul-stirring praise. During the hymn, some of the people left the Church, but many hundreds stayed for the After-meeting, one of the special features of the Mission. Prayers and hymns followed, and some of the leading points of the sermon were pressed home to many hearts. Late into the night the service lasted. Gradually the people dispersed, and the work of another day was over. One of the last to leave the Church, was the stranger whom we followed there. The lights were being extinguished, and the clergy were leaving the Church as he went out. Pressing his hat well over his eyes, he walked quickly past them, and on through the silent streets, till he gained the Hotel in High Street.

Night after night found the stranger in that crowded Church, but never in the same seat twice, for his one desire was to avoid notice, and to come in contact with no

one. All unconscious of the fact, however, he was observed; and more than once the question had been asked:—

“Who is the tall stranger among the last to leave the Mission Service every night?”

But no one seemed to know; and when it was discovered that he was a Mr. Dalton, staying at the “Ludworth Arms,” people were none the wiser for the information.

The Mission week wore on, and the work of the Clergy increased daily. There was a mysterious wonder-working power abroad, which constrained men as by some irresistible impulse, to yield themselves to the influence of the Mission. Well worked as the three parishes in Ludworth always were, yet now, there was an awakening of the spiritual life, which gave an intense reality to lives that had before been ordinary and colourless. The last Sunday came. Two more days, and the Mission would be over.

The Clergy, upborne by Prayer, and God-given strength, held on their way in faith and hope, with one high end in view,—God’s glory in winning souls for Himself.

Early and late they toiled, and prayed, and pleaded, and every day came a fresh earnest of a great in-gathering of souls.

To pass on, however, to this last Sunday. In the afternoon came the children’s final service. The Sunday Schools from the three parishes were all united in the Mother Church, to which the children of rich and poor of all ages, came for their share of the Mission teaching. It

was a touching sight to look on, so many young lives, just entering on the unseen battle, sworn soldiers of the Captain, Who became a little Child for love of us. When the short service was over, the Rector, in his usual, happy way, began speaking to the children. This was his special gift; he seemed to have caught the Spirit of the Great Master, Whose loving Hands rested in blessing on the little ones of old. Whence it came that, having a peculiar sympathy with the transparent simplicity of children, his love for them drew them to love and trust him implicitly.

Mr. Mayne began by sketching the life of a child who has been brought into covenant with God, and sealed for His own in Baptism.

"Jesus called a little child unto Him." After touching for a few moments on the simple narrative. "Every child in this Church has been called by Jesus to come to Him," said the Rector, and then he went on to beg them all to listen to that call, and try to live as God's dear children. "Some day," he added "you will have another call. Whenever a little child dies, it is Jesus calling that little child to Him. He loves it so much, that He wants to make it happy, and quite good, for ever. So dear children, when God sends an Angel to take anyone of *you* Home, let no one say 'The child is *dead*!' but let them say, 'Jesus called a little child unto Him.'"

The Rector ceased. And the children's hymn rose from many voices, and went up on high. The church was again empty; the last echoes of the organ had died away, the pillars

and arches looked solemn and grand in the fading light.

Far back, under the shadow of a pillar, was a kneeling form. The man's face could not be seen; but he had come from behind the organ screen. It was Norton. He knew the Church would not be closed, and he felt he must be alone—alone with that God whom he had forgotten, and failed to serve, since he was a child. Through those days of the Mission, he had been at his post night after night. But at home he said nothing, and his wife supposed that he went to Church as usual,—because he was paid for it.

On the Tuesday the Mission closed, and the great after-work was to begin. Before going away, the Mission Clergy left with the Rector, the names of all those whom they knew to need special help and guidance; and having sown the seed of eternal life in many hearts, they left the Mission to do its silent work, in full faith that the results, if unseen in time, would be known in eternity. Yes! the first bright out-burst of the Mission was over; but the after-glow shed light and warmth into many a heart once cold and dreary; while souls hurrying down to darkness and death, had been suddenly checked, and brought face to face with their lives of sin, and the God of Holiness. A sympathetic chord had been struck, which bound rich and poor together in one living harmony.

CHAPTER XI.

A FEW days after the Mission, Mr. Mayne was disturbed early one morning, by a knock at his study door.

"A gentleman wishes to see you, Sir! He gives no name."

"Ask him to come in."

"Pardon me, Sir, for intruding at this unwonted hour. But I come on urgent business."

"I do not know whom I have the pleasure of addressing," replied the Rector, as he begged the stranger to sit down. A shade of embarrassment crossed the face of the visitor.

His assumed calmness of manner well-nigh forsook him. By a great effort he re-gained his self-control.

"A few days ago," he replied slowly, and with much emphasis, "I should not have hesitated to announce myself as Dalton. But Sir," he added hurriedly, "the events of last week have left me powerless to live a lie."

The dark eyes of the stranger were raised to the Rector's face—and then fell again, beneath his enquiring glance.

"You do not know me; and yet,—you have seen me before." Mr. Mayne passed his hand across his eyes. Then he rose, and walked hurriedly across the room. He

approached the stranger, and again looked earnestly at him.—“Can it be? No. Impossible.—It is a dream!”

The young man fell upon his knees.

“Can you forgive me, *my father?*” We draw a veil over the scene that followed,—too sacred, too deep for words.

After the first great burst of emotion that followed the recognition, Mr. Mayne learnt that his son who would never settle to anything, had soon grown tired of his work in New Zealand. A restless, roving spirit prompted him to break away from the slight restraints of his farming life, and from place to place he roamed, caring not what happened to him so long as he could spend his life in idleness and amusement. Debt and disgrace drove him from place to place; then for a time he would work, and then again squander his earnings in lavish waste and reckless living. At last with no good intent, he resolved to return to England, fate which had used him so ill, might prove more friendly here—and at least he might visit his old haunts unrecognised, after the lapse of years.

After a few days spent in London, Charles Mayne appeared at Ludworth, as we have seen, in the early days of the Mission. And the close of it found the whole current of his thoughts, the whole tenor of his life utterly changed. Thus it had come about, that under God's Providence Mr. Mayne, in providing the means of help for his whole Parish, was unconsciously preparing the means of salvation for his own son; that in his prayers for a blessing to be shed on others, he was calling down the

greatest blessing on himself.

Oh! happiness unspeakable! That the Mission-call to weary and sin-laden souls, had brought conviction to the being so dearly loved,—so earnestly yearned after. Oh! joy to be able to speak the message of pardon and comfort, as the son confessed his sin, and knelt in penitence by the father's side in that solemn hour after the Mission.

. . . . A month passed away, and it was Christmas Eve. A thin covering of snow lay on the ground, and the dull, leaden clouds betokened a heavy fall ere morning.

"Can you tell me the way to Gray's Court?"

"The first opening on your left Sir."

"Thank you." The speaker walked briskly up the road, rough with snow-covered stones.

As he stopped for a moment at the entrance of Gray's Court, the light from a gas-lamp fell full on his face; it wore an expression of earnest thought; of happiness not unmixed with sorrow, as though through great suffering, he had passed to the promise of Peace. Entering the Court, he paused at a cottage-door—"No. 2, this is the house," he mused, and then tapped at the door. What a bright picture that opening door displayed! A large yule log blazing on the hearth cast a flickering light throughout the little room, on a simple cottage family.—Father, mother, and children, all sharing the Christmas joy. Norton sprang to his feet, as the door opened, and a tall figure entered the kitchen.

"Why Sir! Mr. Charles Mayne! Now Jack! where

are your manners ! Wife, give the gentleman a chair."

"You didn't expect a visit from me this evening, Norton. Don't stand, my good friend. Pray sit down Mrs. Norton.

"Now little one, what's your name?" asked the visitor, drawing a little girl towards him, and laying his hand on her head.

"Speak to the gentleman, Mary," said Mrs. Norton, as the child hung her head down and did not reply.

"You are a shy little maid, I see" returned Mr. Mayne.

"Never mind! we'll soon be good friends. Well Norton! I hope you'll have a happy Christmas, and your good wife and children too."

"It's a different Christmas to *last* year," answered Norton quietly. "A great sorrow, and a great happiness has come since then. Though I can't say as the sorrow is as big as the joy."

"You're right there, Jem," put in his wife, "The sorrow is nothing but happiness to the little one that's gone, and as our Rector says, the child is not lost nor dead; but living, and at rest." And the mother's voice trembled, and her eyes grew tearful as she glanced at the little empty chair on which Lizzie used to sit in her corner by the fire.

"Aye, Sir, I can think on her now as I never could before that Mission time. But for *that*, I should never have looked to see my bairn again."

"We can both thank God for the Mission, my friend," was the fervent reply, "May its holy lessons *never* be

forgotten. Let us not be disobedient to the Heavenly Vision!"

"And yet I often think, Sir, how I held out against it; how when one of them good Mission gentlemen came to me one night, and begged me to kneel down and pray, I wouldn't! No Sir! I said I couldn't, and I didn't!" exclaimed Norton emphatically. And I held out to the end every night, till that last Sunday, and then the Rector's words fairly knocked me down, and I was turned right round."

Charles Mayne was silent under the influence of the thoughts passing through his mind. He longed to grasp the poor man's hand, and call him brother; a sudden thrill of sympathy made him yearn to break through every barrier of reserve, and unfold the dark history of his past. To these two men, so far apart in rank and outward circumstances, the Mission had brought one common blessing. For both, a new and brighter future seemed to be in store.

"It seems a strange thing to me, Sir," continued Norton, "that I should have been going and going to that there Church, Sunday after Sunday, and me taking no more notice of what was said, than the stone walls: and then all at once the parson's words come home like a dart, and I said to myself, says I, 'Jem Norton! you're the biggest sinner as ever was,—you've been fighting against God all your life!' and then Sir, *I made up my mind!* may God help me to keep steadfast."

"Aye Sir," chimed in Mrs. Norton "We've had a real

happy home ever since the Mission. Jem's brought me all his bit of money of a Saturday, and we haven't half as many sharp words as we used to have. I think our Lizzie's prayers are getting answered. If she knows, ain't she happy just?"

"Well my good friends," returned Mr. Mayne? "I came partly to wish you a happy Christmas, and partly to bring you something to get your Christmas dinner with, if it's not too late," and he slipped some money into Norton's hand.

"Well! I call that *real* wonderful, wife!" cried Norton.

"Beg pardon Sir, and thank you with all my heart. And now I'll tell you what fairly took my breath away,—There's a lot of men, old mates of mine, as I used to go with every Christmas; and then we would get Christmas boxes, and treat one another, and perhaps have ten shillings in our pockets besides. But this Christmas, my wife says to me: 'Now Jem! don't you go after that work. It'll get you wrong again;' and so I didn't; and we've scarce anything for dinner to-morrow! I never did!"

"Thank you indeed Sir," added Mrs. Norton. "And thank God, for it was Him as sent you, and no mistake."

"You're right there, my good woman," replied the young man fervently. "And now good-night, Norton, this will be a happy Christmas!"

"Aye Sir! the happiest, for all my little bairn has gone. I *never* thought as how my wicked feet would ever get into the way she went on! A happy Christmas to you Sir, and

to the Rector, and his lady, and dear Miss Alice!"

A few minutes more, and the cottage door closed after the visitor, who went forth into the fast-falling snow.

"I must be off wife, and fetch some things in for to-morrow," said Norton cheerily, as he rose and looked for his hat. "Must you Jem? Oh! I wish you hadn't to go out to-night, it's bitter cold!"

"Don't fear Mary You *are* a bit fearful I know, and no wonder when you think of what I *have* done! But I won't be long wife,—and I'll tell you what I've been thinking on. I've been turning over in my mind as to how we could have a bit of reading (the Bible I mean), and a prayer, every morning, afore I go to work. We would only have to get up a bit earlier. Should we start and try, Mary? And if we can't manage to be all of us together in a morning, I'm sure we can at night."

"With all my heart Jem! I'm right glad you'll do it. It's been in my mind too! Well off you start, and we'll have a nice bit of talk when you come in. I'll get the children off to bed while you're out." That being done, Mrs. Norton sat down to her sewing, busy with her own thoughts.

What a change had come over that face since first we saw it! An expression of calm content, and bright, happy joy, instead of the care-worn, restless, unsatisfied look it wore of old, told how great the change had been. Even the children had already caught some of the new spirit of love and gentleness, which cast a light within the little

dwelling.

"Father's never cross now, as he used to be! Mother never says a sharp word now. I wonder why!" So would the children talk together.

Mrs. Norton was aroused from her musings by a hasty lifting of the latch, the door was flung wide open, and in walked the neighbour Betsey Parker, bringing a gust of cold wind and snow-flakes into the kitchen.

"A merry Christmas to you neighbour," cried she, shutting the door noisily. "Alone, are you? The master gone out—Oh!"

A very prolonged "Oh!" uttered in a meaning tone.

"Gone to get some things for to-morrow," replied the wife hastily. "Sit down, Betsey, and make yourself comfortable."

"Thank you. Oh! but it *is* a night! I'm near frozen. I ain't going to stop though. Could you lend me a bit of candle? I'm used up, and I can't go into town to-night, I declare!"

Mrs. Norton went to the cupboard, and brought out two candles!

"You are a good one! thank ye! candles run away that fast that I can't keep up with 'em these short days, they're gone afore I can say 'Betsey Parker!' I'll mind and bring 'em back."

"You'll be pretty clever Betsey," replied Mrs. Norton laughing.

"Well! I mean another pair you know neighbour."

"Yes, but I shan't want 'em thank you,—you're more than welcome. Betsey! you're coming to Church to-morrow. It's Christmas-day you know."

"Church! why I've the dinner to cook; and I guess you have too," retorted Betsey.

"I'm going to cook a bit to-night though, so it'll only want warming up to-morrow. That's how I get to Church mostly of a Sunday morning."

"I'm that tired I can't start cooking and moiling about to-night. Nay, Mrs. Norton, I don't set up for being religious; though I don't go and jeer at folks who do go to Church as *some* do! But I wouldn't like 'em to say 'Betsey Parker' goes to Church for what she can get!" and the woman nodded significantly.

"As to that, it don't so much matter as I can see," replied Mrs. Norton. "Folks must say something, and they'd better say *that* than worse. All I can say is, that in the Church my Jem and I found something that has made us happier than we've ever been; and we just seem as if we couldn't be thankful enough."

"I can read my Bible at home," said Betsey shortly.

"And a very good thing you can," said Mrs. Norton gently. "And my Bible tells me about the 'two or three gathered together,' and the Lord being in the midst of them. You know what I mean, Betsey. It's very clear to me. But now we'll make a bargain! You and your old man come and have a bit of dinner with us, and come along to Church with me to-morrow morning."

Betsey's face brightened.

"Well, I will! but what will folks say? and look at these old boots, neighbour. I can't go in these things; I like to go respectable."

"Nobody will see your boots! Who cares to look and see what you've got on your feet!" cried Mrs. Norton. "That's only the devil," added she, "trying to keep you away from Church!"

"You're a good neighbour, Mary Norton, and I'll come."

At that instant Norton entered, and Betsey, after a few more words, took her departure.

Norton and his wife stood for a moment at the open door. For on the clear frosty air was borne the glad sound of Christmas Bells.

"The little lassie loved those bells," said Norton softly.

"Yes she called them the Angels' music," replied his wife.

"We'll think of her to-morrow when we sing the Christmas hymn she was so fond of:—

'Hark the Herald Angels sing
Glory to the New-born King!'

Her first Christmas up there! Ain't she happy now?"



CHAPTER XII.

ONE more glance at the Nortons, and we have done. Months have lengthened into years, and two years and a half have passed since the Ludworth Mission. Shortly after it, followed a Confirmation, when Norton and several others whom God had called to serve Him, came forward to seek His grace and strength in that holy ordinance.

Happy they, who in their conscious weakness, find their way from time to time to the still higher means of grace, provided for all those who in penitence, and faith, and love, receive their Lord in Holy Communion, and so go forth with God-given strength to fight the hard battle against sin.

The work begun was silently, but surely advancing, all the more deep and real, no doubt, because quiet and hidden.

It was not that startling changes had been wrought perceptibly, in many instances, but in many lives which seemed outwardly the same as before, a spirit of earnestness and reality had in truth taken the place of quiet indifference; while on the other hand, there were homes visibly changed, like the Nortons', proclaiming to the world that there was a life-giving power at work within.

... It was the third Easter-day after the Mission.

The children's service was over, and Norton and his wife, with some of the children, started for their usual

Sunday walk to the Cemetery, to visit Lizzie's grave; and when the children were good, they were allowed to carry flowers to lay on the little grassy mound.

Up the hill on the south side of the town they went, and soon gained the Cemetery gates.

Norton passed quickly along the little path-way their feet had so often trodden. His wife followed. At last, at the accustomed spot, he paused. Then he looked eagerly into his wife's face.

"Jem! why, what's this? where's our Lizzie's grave? This was the place,—but—I don't know—what does it mean!"

The Easter sun shone brightly on a little grassy grave, and on a simple stone cross at the head of it.

"Come here, dear wife," said Norton, in a deep, low voice. She knelt down, close to the little head-stone. At the base of it, she read these words,—

ELIZABETH NORTON,

AGED 10 YEARS.

"Jesus called a little child unto Him."

"Oh! Jem!"

"Yes, Mary, I never told you. But I've saved a bit of money that I used to spend in drink; and here it is! Joining that 'Temperance Society' was a good day for me; but the Mission was my starting-time. Thank God for calling Lizzie Home. And thank Him too for calling us to follow her!"

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the 1990s, the number of people in the world who are undernourished has increased from 600 million to 800 million (FAO 2001).

There is a growing awareness of the need to improve the nutritional status of the world's population, and the World Health Organization (WHO) has set a target of halving the number of undernourished people in the world by the year 2015 (WHO 2000). This paper reports on a study that was designed to assess the nutritional status of a community in a rural area of the north-east of Scotland.

Methods

Study area

The study was carried out in a rural area of the north-east of Scotland, which is one of the poorest of the four Scottish regions. The population of the area is 10000, and the majority of the population are employed in agriculture. The area is predominantly rural, with a small town of 2000 people.

The area is one of the poorest in Scotland, with a high unemployment rate and a low average income. The area is also one of the most deprived in Scotland, with a high proportion of the population living in poverty.

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